

TROTSKY

'Workers of the world
unite'

PART 1.

His ideas

In France the Communist Party mobilize the working class and... simply because de Gaulle's 'peaceful' settlement was a big step forward in the development of the revolutionary movement.

Communist Party blame

In Spain, Madrid and Barcelona demonstrations of young students and workers shake the dictatorship of Franco. In Greece and workers

that is why the beginning of a new revolutionary leadership, based on the teachings of Marx - and his organizational

20th century leaders Lenin and Trotsky - is

RED Leon Trotsky

World Trotzkist RED FLAG Cossack

her words, this man is to the right of the old yet 'left' enough to be the Executive Committee of the Communist Party.

COGIT

with advance orders for 1,000 copies, here at last is the first part of Monty Johnstone's study of Trotsky and Trotskyism. The delay has been due to printing problems. These are probably now solved, so that we can assure readers that in future there will be only a decent delay between issues.

Such is the neglect of the subject of Trotsky by the Communist movement - although not by other sections of the Left - that Monty Johnstone has had to start from scratch. His painstaking research, and the profundity of his analysis merit more than a few issues of COGITO, albeit with certainty of a reprint; a book is called for. We hope he finds the time and a publisher.

We recommend to readers a recent article by Monty, "Trotsky and the Debate on Socialism in One Country" in New Left Review, 50, July-August 1968, 5/6d. from NLR, 7 Carlisle Street, London, W.1.

The next issue of COGITO will be published in January. It contains a symposium on the history, role and current problems of the British trade union movement

We welcome the birth of a new publication, Internationale. It is the international affairs bulletin of the Young Communist League. The first issue is now available. It contains a main article by Thabo Mbeki on Southern Africa, together with articles on Czechoslovakia, Portugal, and Regis Debray's Revolution in the Revolution? Copies can be obtained, price 1/-, plus postage, from YCL, 16 King Street, London, W.C.2.

This is the first opportunity COGITO has had to make any comment on the tragic events of August 20th-21st. In the columns of Challenge, in three press statements, and in COGITO supplements, the YCL has made its position clear. We condemn the invasion and oppose the two Moscow diktats, which the Czechoslovak Government accepted under duress. Our attention now centres around three main points. Firstly, the serious ideological differences in the International Communist Movement, which are revealed by the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Secondly, we wonder whether the five Warsaw Pact powers are mindful of the damage caused by their actions to the international movement. Thirdly, we express our solidarity with the Communist Party, youth movement and people of Czechoslovakia in facing their present formidable problems, which are not of their own making. In this connection we quote here some excerpts from a radio interview with Josef Smrkovsky, on September 9th. Comrade Smrkovsky is Chairman of the National Assembly of Czechoslovakia, which was in constant session from the beginning of the occupation. The comparable State body in the Soviet Union is the Supreme Soviet, which did not meet prior to the invasion, did not meet after it took place, and is not scheduled to meet until December 10th.

"In recent days I have heard from different people rather pessimistic views. Today I am inured against pessimism as I have not been for a long time. Today the Party to which I belong, of which I am an officer, our Communist Party, is really the Party of our people. And there exists a unity, an enormous will to build our Czechoslovak socialism, our Republic, where, along with the basic socialist principles, there will also be humanism, there will be human rights, there will be what Comrade Dubcek expressed very simply but beautifully: socialism with a human face.

"We shall do this although the path to it is thorny. We shall do this because we have fortresses of socialism like the United Steel Works, factories like this in the hundreds and thousands in our country. And today, every

"factory and also every agricultural co-operative is a fortress of socialism. That is why I am not afraid When I add to all this our Czechoslovak youth, that wonderful generation which has grown up into people who have surprised us all by their high morale, wisdom and education, patriotism, courage and cool-headedness I repeat, I am not afraid.

"But once again I must say that it will not be easy. But we shall not learn to have a double face - to speak in one way and to act in another. We shall maintain our frankness. What we have agreed to in Moscow we shall fulfil. At the same time, however, we shall consistently give greater meaning to that article of the protocol that says that our Communist Party will continue the policy begun in January this year."

Meantime the Soviet Union continues its gross interference in Czechoslovak affairs.

the Editor.

COGITO SUPPLEMENTS

the following are available:

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| Number 2 (6d) | REPORTS OF WORLD YOUTH FESTIVAL & YCL DELEGATION TO YUGOSLAVIA - Jenny Maldon and Colin Yardley. |
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TROTSKYISM

Monty Johnstone

"The itch is a painful disease. And when people are seized by the itch of revolutionary phase-making the mere sight of this disease causes intolerable suffering. Truths ... are distorted by those suffering from the above-mentioned kind of itch. Often this distortion arises from the best, the noblest and loftiest impulses, merely owing to a failure to digest well-known theoretical truths or a childishly crude, schoolboyishly slavish repetition of them irrelevantly ... If the itch claims to be 'theory' it is intolerable."

*[Lenin, The Revolutionary Phrase,
Moscow, 1965, pp. 30-31.]*

"By revolutionary phrase-making we mean the repetition of revolutionary slogans irrespective of objective circumstances at a given turn in events, in the given state of affairs obtaining at the time. The slogans are superb, alluring, intoxicating, but there are no grounds for them; such is the nature of the revolutionary phrase."

*[Lenin, The Revolutionary Phrase,
p. 19.]*

INTRODUCTION

The last three years have seen the appearance for the first time in Britain of a youth organisation - the Young Socialists⁽¹⁾, publishing the monthly, Keep Left - that directly and openly declares its adherence to the doctrines of Leon Trotsky. On the basis of a high level of political activity and propaganda against imperialism and racialism, the betrayals of the Wilson Government, America's war in Vietnam and NATO, they have attracted to their ranks hundreds of sincere young people who, like the members of the Young Communist League, seek a revolutionary way out of the blind alley of capitalism.

Marxists do not, however, judge a Socialist organisation by how revolutionary its demands sound or by the level of activity or subjective intentions of its members. They must start from a sober and thorough-going analysis of how far its policies and campaigning will in practice help to unite and carry forward the working class and its allies along the road to Socialism. Unfortunately, alongside some good exposures of capitalism and of right-wing policies, the Young Socialists and the Socialist Labour League, of which it is the youth organisation, advocate policies which, we shall seek to demonstrate, can only result in dividing rather than advancing the movement for both the immediate and the longer-term objectives desired by their members.

(1) Not to be confused with the Labour Party Young Socialists from which they officially broke away early in 1965. Rival Trotskyist youth groups continue to work inside the Labour Party youth organisation.

Barely an issue of Keep Left or the S.L.L.'s twice weekly paper, The Newsletter, appear without carrying the most virulent attacks on the Y.C.L., and the Communist Party which, they say, "has come clearly into the open as the party of counter-revolution. Its role is to sabotage the struggle of the working class against Wilson⁽¹⁾". All this makes their appeals for "unity" with us "counter-revolutionaries" sound somewhat bizarre, unless of course they are intended as a means to getting closer to us the better to disrupt our "reactionary", "Stalinist" organisations in the hope of recruiting members for themselves. This they have attempted to do more than once in recent years by organising factions working inside the Y.C.L., under their direction.

There is an old Russian proverb: "A spoonful of tar spoils a barrelful of honey". The honey of the S.L.L., and Y.S. leaders' anti-capitalist propaganda is spoilt by ladlefuls of tar aimed at blackening the image of every other section of the left whose leaders, even on a local level, are subjected to a welter of personal abuse.

The S.L.L. and Y.S. ("Healyites") vie with various other groups and grouplets ("Pabloites", "revisionists" and "Posadasites"), anathemas against whom take up an extraordinarily large amount of space in their press, for recognition as the only "true" Trotskyists. Each of the three "Fourth Internationals", to one or other of which most of them belong, claims to be the legitimate continuation of the puny body formed in 1938 by Trotsky who claimed that "during the next ten years the programme of the Fourth International will become the guide of millions⁽²⁾".

After Lenin's final illness in 1923, Trotsky's adherents argue he led the struggle in Russia and the international Communist movement to preserve the revolutionary traditions of Marxism-Leninism against Stalin who became the "grave-digger" of the Russian Revolution and the Communist International. Trotskyism, they claim, represents revolutionary Communism, as against the official Communist Parties which are dubbed "reformist" and "Stalinist". although the great bulk of them accept the extremely critical re-appraisal of Stalin made at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 and a number are carrying this considerably further both in theory and in practice.

A full discussion among Marxists about the political positions and roles of both Stalin and Trotsky are long overdue. Involving as it will do an assessment of the major policies and events of the Russian and international labour movements over four decades such a debate will be far-ranging, complicated but profoundly instructive.

Such work would, however, be utterly sterile if carried out from the old positions of fixed adherence to Stalin or to Trotsky. Neither apologetics nor demonology but the Marxist method of objective critical and self-critical analysis in the light of historical experience is required to arrive at a balanced estimate.

The Twentieth Congress, by smashing the Stalin cult, opened the way for such an approach in the world Communist movement which embraces the great bulk of Marxists throughout the world. Old sectarian habits and attitudes and bureaucratic resistances have held it up, but things are changing in this respect in many Communist Parties.

(1) The Newsletter, London, 27th January 1968.

(2) Trotsky speaks on Fourth International (Recorded Speech, 18th October, 1938), in Socialist Appeal, London, June 1943.

Among the Trotskyists, however, the Trotsky cult still continues. Even those like Ernest Mandel, who are denounced as "revisionists" by the paragons of Trotskyist rigidity, the Socialist Labour League, seem to feel bound to sacrifice their critical faculties to the "need" for an all-round justification of Trotsky⁽¹⁾. (Such a whole-scale defence of Stalin is today only undertaken by a small handful of primitives within the Maoist movement.) As for the S.L.L., it does not stop at telling us that they have "followed a man who, on every major point of Soviet policy, was right" whilst Stalin "was inevitably and so often catastrophically wrong"⁽²⁾. Its Political Committee even adduces as the most crushing condemnation of an old leader of a rival Trotskyist "International" that, disagreeing with Trotsky on a tactical question in the late '30's, the miscreant had made so bold as "to disobey Trotsky's instructions"⁽³⁾.

Intelligent, critically-minded Young Socialists must find this sort of thing hard to swallow. We would hope also that they will not be content just to learn to trot out the highly selective potted history of the international labour movement and one-sided account of Communism which are served up in their papers and education classes. They should not imagine that they can obtain an objective knowledge of the great controversies within the Marxist movement only by studying the magnificently written but highly slanted polemical works of Trotsky, which are recommended to them totally uncritically issue after issue of their press. As Lenin told the Russian Young Communists, it is necessary to take "the sum total of human knowledge ... in such a way that Communism shall not be something learned by rote, but something that you yourselves have thought over, that it shall be an inevitable conclusion from the point of view of modern education"⁽⁴⁾.

This article will attempt first to look at Trotsky's life and see, within the limits of the space, how his major doctrines, policies and predictions stand up against what has actually happened in history, the great laboratory in which all social movements and ideas are ultimately tested. It will then go on to examine some of the policies that his followers have pursued since his death and put forward today.

On 10th February, The Newsletter threw out a challenge: "If the Y.C.L. has got a case against Trotskyism, then why don't they produce it?" This article, issued for discussion, is a first attempt to make such a case. The case is a political one. Personal abuse and innuendo do not figure in it. It will be interesting to see if the S.L.L.'s reply will be of a similar kind.

(1) See E. Mandel, "Trotsky: An Anti-Critique", in New Left Review, London, January-February, 1968.

(2) The Newsletter, 20th September, 1964, p.3.

(3) Fourth International (London), Autumn/Winter 1964-65. This contrasts strangely with S.L.L. National Secretary Gerry Healy's assertion at a Socialist Forum in 1957 (where a speaker had warned against a Trotsky cult) that nobody should be put on a pedestal. (The Newsletter, 10th May 1957, p.5.)

(4) V.I. Lenin, Selected Works (London, 1937), Volume 9, p. 472.

PART 1: LEON TROTSKY

Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) to whose heritage half a dozen warring Trotskyist groups lay claim, is a major, though extremely controversial, figure in the history of international Socialism, who played a role second only to Lenin in the leadership of the Russian Socialist Revolution of October 1917.

Before 1917

Born into a well-to-do Jewish farmer's family, he joined the workers' movement as a young man in South Russia at the end of the last century. Soon embracing Marxism and joining the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, he suffered years of prison and exile for his revolutionary activities. One of the most brilliant orators and writers of this century, he played a leading role in the St. Petersburg (now Leningrad) Soviet (Council) of Workers' Delegates in 1905 in the first Russian Revolution against the Tsarist autocracy. After the revolution was crushed, he was sentenced in 1906 to life deportation in Siberia from which he made a dramatic escape. From 1907 till 1914 he lived with his family in Vienna working as correspondent for a Russian Liberal daily, whilst editing his own Socialist paper for illegal circulation in Russia. When the First World War broke out in 1914 he opposed it as an imperialist struggle by both groups of powers and took part in 1915 in the Zimmerwald Conference of Internationalist Socialists alongside Lenin, although the two men were extremely critical of each other's tactical positions. After the beginning of the war Trotsky had moved to Switzerland and then to France, from which he was deported, making his way to the U.S.A. early in 1917.

(a) Trotsky, Lenin and the Bolshevik Party

When the Trotskyists present Trotsky as the comrade-in-arms of Lenin and the true representative of Leninism after his death, it is important to be aware that in fact Trotsky only worked with Lenin in the Bolshevik Party for six years (1917-23). "He had passed the earlier thirteen or fourteen years", as his highly sympathetic but also extremely objective biographer Isaac Deutscher notes, "in factional struggle against Lenin, assailing him with ferocious personal insults, as 'slovenly attorney', as 'hideous caricature of Robespierre, malicious and morally repulsive', as 'exploiter of Russian backwardness', 'demoraliser of the Russian working class', etc., insults compared with which Lenin's rejoinders were restrained, almost mild"⁽¹⁾.

The basis for this antagonism was Trotsky's violent opposition to Lenin's struggle to build up a stable, centralised and disciplined Marxist party. When at the second congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party a split took place between the Bolsheviks (majority of the Central Committee elected at the Congress), who favoured such a party, and the Mensheviks (minority), who wanted a much looser form of organisation, Trotsky sided with the latter, and belonged to the five-man shadow Central Committee that they formed. Reporting on the congress he said that Lenin had "assumed the role of the party's disorganiser" and, impelled by a yearning for power, was imposing upon the party a "state of siege

1 Isaac Deutscher, The Prophet Outcast (London, 1963) pp. 249-250.

and his "iron fist"⁽¹⁾. In 1904 he left the Mensheviks and, though continuing to write for their press and even having occasion to act abroad on their behalf, was to remain from then till 1917 formally outside of both parties. (Outlining his life in 1937, by a sleight of hand he changed the date of the emergence of Bolshevism and Menshevism as separate tendencies from 1903 to 1904 in order that he could present himself as never having belonged to the Mensheviks, adding that his line had "coincided in every fundamental way" with Lenin's⁽²⁾.) However during all this time he never changed his Menshevik views on the party, which he developed with great virulence in 1904 in his booklet Our Political Tasks, dedicated to his "dear teacher" the Menshevik leader Axelrod and described by Deutscher as "the most strident bill of impeachment that any Socialist had ever drawn up against Lenin"⁽³⁾. (When in the 1920's, Trotsky's works were published in Russia, he did not have it included.)

Lenin had argued, (most fully in his What is to be done? (published in 1902), that left to itself the working class would only obtain "trade union consciousness", i.e., an awareness of the need to struggle for economic demands within the framework of capitalism. Socialist consciousness needed to be brought to the workers from outside and Socialist intellectuals who had mastered Marxist theory had a particularly important role to play here. In this pamphlet, One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (1904), Lenin went on to stress the need however for the workers in the Party, who had acquired a sense of discipline and organisation through their industrial experience, to transmit this to the intellectuals who acquired it with much greater difficulty⁽⁴⁾. Completely distorting this complementary role of workers and intellectuals in the Russian workers' party as Lenin conceived it and disdainfully rejecting his notion of party discipline, Trotsky wrote: "According to Lenin's new philosophy ... it suffices for the proletarian to pass through the 'school of the factory' to give the intellectuals, who are meanwhile playing the leading role in his party, lessons in political discipline! ... The Russian proletariat should tomorrow, according to Lenin's cry, give a rigorous lesson to 'anarchic individualism' ... What indignation seizes you when you read these disgraceful and dissolutely demagogic lines! That very proletariat that yesterday you were saying was spontaneously drawn to 'trade unionism' is today already called upon to give lessons in political discipline. And to whom? To that very intelligentsia to which, according to yesterday's scheme, belonged the role of bringing to the proletariat from outside its class, its political consciousness! ... And that is Marxism! ... Indeed, it is impossible to treat the best ideological heritage of the proletariat with greater cynicism than is done by Lenin!"⁽⁵⁾.

Lenin made it perfectly clear that he favoured a democratic party in which the Party congress was sovereign and considered that "the struggle between shades of opinion inside the Party is unavoidable and necessary as long as it does not lead to anarchy and

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1. Quoted by I. Deutscher, The Prophet Armed (London, 1954. pp. 83-84).
 2. The Case of Leon Trotsky. (New York, 1937), p. 471.
 3. Deutscher, op. cit., p. 89.
 4. V.I. Lenin, Selected Works, (London, 1936-38), hereafter S.W. II, pp. 442-6.
 5. N. Trotsky, Nashi Politicheskie Zadachi (Geneva, 1904), pp. 73, 75. Emphasis in original.

(1) Trotsky, however, as so often in his later life, substituted swashbuckling rhetoric and the flights of fancy for a calm examination of his opponent's position. Lenin's methods, he wrote, would lead to a situation where "the Party organisation (apparatus) 'substitutes' itself for the Party, the Central Committee substitutes itself for the Party organisation, and finally a 'dictator' substitutes himself for the C.C. ... "(2) And he went on to ascribe immorality, suspiciousness and intolerance to Lenin, whom he described as the "leader of the reactionary wing of our Party".(3). Yet this was the very same Lenin of whom he was later to write: "Patience and loyalty towards the opposition were among the most important traits of his leadership"!(4).

In the years following the defeat of the 1905 Revolution, Trotsky played the role of a "conciliator", trying to smooth over the differences between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, a large part of whom now in practice favoured the liquidation of the underground revolutionary party and its replacement by a legal reformist Labour Party. "Trotsky", wrote Lenin in December 1910, "represents his own personal vacillations and nothing more". After describing his year by year move from one position to another, Lenin went on: "One day Trotsky plagiarises from the ideological stock-in-trade of one faction; the next day he plagiarises from that of another, and therefore declares himself to be standing above both factions".(5) The "standpoint of a matchmaker" constituted "the entire 'ideological basis'" of his conciliationism⁽⁶⁾, remarked Lenin the previous year. "He always manages to 'creep into the cracks' of this or that difference of opinion, and desert one side for the other", he observed on another occasion.(7) When in 1912 the Bolsheviks finally split from the Mensheviks and constituted their own independent party, Trotsky reacted by organising the unprincipled "August Bloc" with the Mensheviks including "liquidators" and a rag-tag and bobtail of other groups of anti-Bolshevik emigres that quickly fell apart. He was motivated by his unbridled opposition to Lenin and the Bolshevik Party, which united the bulk of politically active Socialist workers in Russia itself. "The rotten discord systematically incited by Lenin, the master of this art, the professional exploiter of the backwardness of the Russian labour movement, appears like an absurd nightmare", he wrote to the Menshevik leader Chkheidze in 1913. "Lenin has made the paper (Pravda) into a tool for his sectarian intrigues and his disruptive tendencies In a word, the whole of Leninism at this moment is founded on lies and falsehood and contains the seed of its own decay ... the gangrene will not be long in setting in among the Leninists". And he goes on to favour a policy of "destruction of the very bases of Leninism, which is incompatible with the organisation of the workers into a political

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1. Lenin, S.W., II, pp. 448, 427. Emphasis in original.
 2. Trotsky, op. cit., p. 54.
 3. ibid., p. 98.
 4. L. Trotsky in New International (New York), October 1939, p. 297.
 5. Lenin, V.I. Collected Works (London, 1963) XVI. p391. See, also, Lenin's article, "Violation of Unity under Cover of Cries for Unity", in S.W., IV, pp 187-208).
 6. Lenin, S.W. IV, p. 42.
 7. S.W., IV, p. 286.

party but flourishes perfectly on the dung of splits".⁽¹⁾ (This letter was found after the October Revolution in the archives of the Tsarist secret police. When Olminsky, the President of the Commission of Party History, asked him whether it should be published, he replied that this would be "inopportune", adding paternalistically: "The reader of today will not understand, will not apply the necessary historical correctives and will simply be confused".⁽²⁾ This was precisely the Stalinist motivation for the suppression and falsification of historical documents that was in later years to be so roundly and so correctly denounced by Trotsky himself!)

Writing of this period of Trotsky's life, Isaac Deutscher comments: "The years between 1907 and 1914 form in his life a chapter singularly devoid of political achievement.... Trotsky does not claim any practical revolutionary achievement to his credit. In these years, however, Lenin, assisted by his followers, was forging his party, and men like Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin and, later, Stalin were growing to a stature which enabled them to play leading parts within the party in 1917".⁽³⁾ Trotsky, in fact, as we have seen, devoted himself at this time to endeavouring to obstruct the birth and development of this party without which, as he was to recognise later, the Socialist Revolution could never have succeeded in Russia.

"I had not freed myself at that period especially in the organisational sphere from the traits of a petty bourgeois revolutionist", Trotsky was to acknowledge at the end of his life. "I was sick with the disease of conciliationism toward Menshevism and with a distrustful attitude toward Leninist centralism".⁽⁴⁾ The S.L.L. do not wish to dwell on this. Though they are normally without equals when it comes to looking into people's political pasts, they have no taste for it when the subject is Trotsky. "What is the point of all those details about the disputes between Lenin and Trotsky in the early 1900's?" they ask Communist Party members. "On the question of party organisation Trotsky admitted that he was wrong and Lenin was right when he joined the Bolshevik Party in 1917, and ever afterwards he defended Lenin against the people who tried to use Trotsky's early writings on organisation against Leninism".⁽⁵⁾

The fact is, however, that although Trotsky was to join the Bolshevik Party in July 1917, under the impetus of the oncoming October Revolution in which he was to play an outstanding role, we find in these fourteen years of Trotsky's life (between the crucial ages of 24 and 37) the very inability to devote himself in a non-revolutionary period to the overriding task of building up a solid organisation, fitting himself into its ranks, and hence being prepared to submit himself to its collective leadership and discipline that was to reveal itself again after the storms of revolution had died down. In the fiasco of the Fourth International that he was to endeavour to create in the '30's can be seen the same inability to create a stable revolutionary organisation of his own, whilst hurling abuse from the sidelines at those who have done this, as Lenin noted in the collapse of Trotsky's August (1912) '

1. L. Trotsky to N.S. Chkheidze, 1 April, 1913, in Trotski et le Trotskisme Textes et Documents (Paris, 1937), pp. 60-61).

2. L. Trotsky to M.S. Olminski, 6 December 1921, ibid., p. 62.

3. The Prophet Armed, p. 176.

4. L. Trotsky, In Defense of Marxism (New York, 1963), p. 141.

5. "Open letter from N.E.C. of S.L.L. to Communist Party Congress Delegates", Newsletter, 1 April, 1961.

Bloc⁽¹⁾ (It is no accident that even in Trotsky's lifetime the Trotskyist movement was split in many countries, that there are today at least three Trotskyist Fourth Internationals and that none of them has a section of more than a few hundred members, whilst most count their numbers in tens, and not infrequently in units. The one exception is Ceylon where for special historical reasons the Trotskyist Lanka Sama Samaja did become a mass party - only to be repudiated by all the Fourth Internationals for the crime of "Popular Frontism" and "reformism", when a few years ago it participated with the party of the national bourgeoisie in government under Mrs. Bandaranaike.) In Trotsky's personal mud-slinging at Lenin in these early years can be seen what his biographer described as "a characteristic of which he could never quite free himself: he could not separate ideas from men."⁽²⁾ It is something that the S.L.L. and The Newsletter have inherited from him. It would be unhistorical indeed if, in evaluating Trotsky, we were to ignore his struggle against Bolshevism during the first fourteen years of its existence - or consider the matter closed by quoting a remark that Lenin is alleged³ on Trotsky's authority⁽³⁾ - to have made in November 1917 (in the midst of the Revolution and after the latter had been in the Party less than four months) to the effect that after he had understood that unity with the Mensheviks was impossible, "there was no better Bolshevik than Trotsky."⁽⁴⁾

(b) Trotsky's Theory of "Permanent Revolution"

"One ought not to bring up these old disagreements" between Lenin and Trotsky on the Party, the S.L.L. tell us, "without also mentioning that on the question of the course and character of the Russian Revolution, Lenin came over to Trotsky's position in April 1917"⁽⁵⁾. The Trotskyist ideologist Ernest Mandel, in his recent apologia for Trotsky, writes: "Nobody will dispute that Trotsky rejected the essence of Lenin's theory of organisation before 1917. In justice to Trotsky it must be added, however, that before 1917 Lenin likewise rejected the necessity of adopting as the strategic goal for the coming Russian revolution the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The victory of the October Revolution resulted from a historical combination of Lenin's theory and practice of the revolutionary vanguard party, and Trotsky's theory and practice of the permanent revolution."⁽⁶⁾ To assess this claim and the theory of "permanent revolution" crucial to Trotskyism we must look first at the old Russia of the Tsars.

1. Lenin, S.W., IV, pp. 197-8.

2. The Prophet Armed, p. 93.

3. L. Trotsky, The Stalin School of Falsification (New York, 1937), p. 105. Trotsky reproduces a proof of an allegedly suppressed page of the Minutes of the Petrograd Committee of the Bolsheviks.

4. Quoted frequently by Trotskyists, e.g. Jack Gale, "The Lies about Trotsky are wearing thin", in Newsletter, 27 November 1965, and most recently, by Ernest Mandel, "Trotsky's Marxism: an Anti-Critique", in New Left Review (London), January/February 1968, p. 34, in reply to N. Krassov's very interesting criticism of Trotsky's relation to the Party in New Left Review July/August 1967. Actually, as we shall see, Trotsky was to clash again seriously politically with Lenin over the Brest Litovsk Treaty after he had been in the Party for less than six months.

5. S.L.L. Open Letter, ibid. Emphasis in original.

6. Mandel, ibid., p. 53. My emphasis.

Tsarist Russia entered the 20th Century as a backward oppressive semi-feudal country consisting predominantly of poor peasants but with a small and militant working class in a relatively small number of industrial centres. Marx and Engels saw a similar situation in Germany in 1848 when they wrote the Communist Manifesto describing the immediate task of the Communists there as support for the coming bourgeois revolution against the absolute monarchy and the feudal squirearchy which would clear the way for a direct struggle by the workers against capitalism.⁽¹⁾ In their Address to the League of Communists of March 1850 they saw ahead a revolutionary drama in two acts: the first a bourgeois democratic revolution that the workers should support and push forward that would bring to power the middle class Democrats; the second, a Socialist one, that would bring the workers to power. "It is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent, until all more or less possessing classes have been forced out of their position of dominance, until the proletariat has conquered state power, and advanced towards Socialism in all the dominant countries of the world, they wrote. The workers' battle cry must be:" The Revolution in Permanence".⁽²⁾

Lenin and the Bolsheviks basing themselves on this conception of permanent revolution and applying it to the specific conditions of Russia, saw the Russian people faced "not with the task of making a Socialist revolution, but with the task of making a democratic revolution".⁽³⁾ Such a bourgeois democratic revolution, wrote Lenin in 1905 in his Two Tactics of Social Democracy, would "for the first time properly clear the ground for a wide and rapid European, and not Asiatic, development of capitalism" and "for the first time make it possible for the bourgeoisie to rule as a class".⁽⁴⁾ At best it would "bring about a radical redistribution of the land to the advantage of the peasantry, establish consistent and full democracy including the republic, eliminate all the oppressive features of Asiatic bondage, not only of village but also of factory life", as well as improving the living standards of the workers and sparking off revolution in Europe.⁽⁵⁾ The bourgeoisie, too inconsistent and too prone to compromise with Tsarism, could not be entrusted with leading such a revolution, as the Mensheviks believed. The working class would need to play "the part of leader of the people's revolution"⁽⁶⁾ in alliance with the mass of the peasantry. It was at present a minority. "It can become the great overwhelming majority", he wrote, "only if it combines with the mass of semi-proletarians, semi-small proprietors, i.e., with the mass of the petty-bourgeois, urban and rural poor." Arguing against the view of the Russo-German Social Democrat Parvus that if the revolution against Tsarism was to be led by the workers, it should put in power a workers' government, Lenin went on: "Such a composition of the social basis of the possible and desirable revolutionary-democratic dictatorship will, of course, find its reflection in the composition of the revolutionary government. With such a composition the participa-

1. K. Marx and F. Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party (London, 1946), p. 38.

2. K. Marx and F. Engels, Selected Works, (London, 1950), pp. 102, 108.

3. Lenin, S.W., III, p. 36.

4. ibid., p. 73. My emphasis.

5. ibid., p. 82.

6. ibid., p. 41.

tion or even the predominance of the most diversified representatives of revolutionary democracy in such a government will be inevitable."⁽¹⁾ For Lenin and the Bolsheviks the strategic goal of the whole period up to February 1917 was the overthrow of the Tsarist autocracy and the establishment of such a revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry, as they called it. Having advanced from autocracy to a republic, the workers should then struggle to pass "from a petty bourgeois democratic republic to socialism"⁽²⁾ - the second act of the revolutionary drama. "From the democratic revolution we shall at once, according to the degree of our strength, the strength of the class conscious and organised proletariat", he wrote, "begin to pass over to the Socialist revolution. We stand for continuous (permanent) revolution. We shall not stop half way."⁽³⁾

To Marx's and Lenin's concept of permanent revolution Trotsky from 1905 counterposed a theory with the same attractive title, the "lion's share of which was contributed by Parvus", as he was to acknowledge himself.⁽⁴⁾ Trotsky's "absurdly 'Left' theory of 'permanent revolution'"⁽⁵⁾ set as the direct objective of revolution in Tsarist Russia the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which, he argued would solve the tasks of both the bourgeois and the Socialist revolutions without passing through the intermediate stage of the democratic dictatorship of the working class and the peasantry. Russia could be the first country in the world to establish such a proletarian dictatorship. But, he wrote in 1906 in his Results and Prospects, "without the direct State support of the European proletariat the working class of Russia cannot convert its temporary domination into a lasting Socialist dictatorship. Of this there cannot for one moment be any doubt.... Left to its own resources the working class of Russia will inevitably be crushed by the counter-revolution the moment the peasantry turns its back on it."⁽⁶⁾ Although Trotsky viewed the peasantry as a source of potential support in the revolution for the working class who once in power would appear before it as a liberator,⁽⁷⁾ he saw the workers "in the early stages of its rule making deep inroads into capitalist property", which included peasant property. Hence they would come "into hostile collision not only with all the groupings of the bourgeoisie which supported it in the first stages of its revolutionary struggle, but also with the broad masses of the peasantry with the help of which it came to power."⁽⁸⁾ Here we have the two main aspects of the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution: firstly, the conception that "for the backward countries the road to democracy passed through the dictatorship of the proletariat" (as against Lenin's conception that the road to the dictatorship of the proletariat passed through democracy, and, secondly, the belief that, if it remains isolated, a workers' state must inevitably succumb to growing internal and external contradictions.⁽⁹⁾

1. ibid., p. 35.

2. ibid., p. 99.

3. ibid., p. 145. My emphasis.

4. Quoted by Deutscher, Prophet Armed, p. 219.

5. Lenin, S.W., IV, p. 207.

6. L. Trotsky, Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects (New York, 1965), pp. 237, 247, Trotsky's emphasis.

7. ibid., p. 203.

8. L. Trotsky, Preface (1922) to 1905 (Moscow, 1922), p. 4.

9. L. Trotsky, Permanent Revolution, pp. 8-9.

The contrast between the respective approaches of Lenin and of Trotsky emerges very sharply from an article written by Trotsky in October 1915 entitled "The Struggle for Power". "A national bourgeois revolution is impossible in Russia", he asserted a little over a year before such a revolution was to take place, "because there is no genuinely revolutionary bourgeois democracy. The time for national revolutions has passed - at least for Europe - just as the time for national wars has passed". The epoch of imperialism in which they were living, he continued, "does not set the bourgeois nation in opposition to the old regime, but sets the proletariat in opposition to the bourgeois nation". After playing down the effect of class differentiation among the peasantry, he predicted that "if the proletariat does not tear power out of the hands of the monarchy no-one else will do so" and that this "must transfer power to the class that has led the struggle, i.e., the Social-Democratic proletariat".⁽¹⁾

To this Lenin replied that Trotsky had incorrectly interpreted the inter-relation of classes in the impending revolution which was "the principal task of a revolutionary party". Indicating the increased class struggle and political awakening among the peasantry, Lenin argued that "Trotsky is in fact helping the liberal labour politicians in Russia who by the 'repudiation' of the role of the peasantry mean refusal to rouse the peasantry to revolution!" The workers on the other hand were fighting "for the participation of 'non-proletarian masses of the people' in freeing bourgeois Russia from military-fuedal 'imperialism' (Tsarism)." From there they would proceed to the Socialist revolution.⁽²⁾

The February Revolution of 1917 was not the proletariat fighting the bourgeois nation, as foreseen by Trotsky, but the overthrow of Tsarism by a bourgeois revolution carried through by the workers and peasants, that Lenin had foreseen. Power did not pass into the hands of a workers' government, / Soviets (Councils) / it was shared of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, representing the democratic between dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry (the bulk of soldiers were peasants), and the capitalist Provisional Government to which it was voluntarily surrendering its supremacy. In April 1917, when according to the S.D.L. he came over to Trotsky's position, Lenin wrote: "The Bolshevik slogans and ideas in general have been fully corroborated by history; but concretely, things have turned out differently than could have been anticipated (by anyone): they are more original, more specific, more variegated... 'The revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' has already become a reality, in a certain form and to a certain extent, in the Russian revolution".⁽³⁾ And at the end of the same month he was expressing his disagreement with "Trotskyism" whose position be summarised as "No Tsar, but a workers' government".⁽⁴⁾

Now that the monarchy was overthrown and "the bourgeois democratic revolution completed, inasmuch as Russia is now a democratic republic"⁽⁵⁾, Lenin mobilised the Bolshevik Party for the second stage of the revolution, which had to transfer power into the hands of the proletariat and the poor strata of the peasantry and take Russia out of the imperialist war. This was achieved with

1. ibid, pp. 251, 253-4, Trotsky's emphasis.

2. Lenin, S.W., V, pp. 162-3.

3. S.W., VI, p. 33. Lenin's emphasis.

4. Lenin, Collected Works (London/New York, n.d.), XX/1, p. 207.

5. Lenin, S.W., VI, p. 385.

the October Socialist Revolution. Between November 1917 and March 1918 a coalition government of Bolsheviks, representing the workers, and the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, representing the poor peasants, ruled the country.

Trotsky was to object however that the traditional, Leninist strategy was invalidated by the fact that "the party and the class understood the democratic dictatorship as a regime which would mercilessly destroy the old state apparatus of the monarchy and completely liquidate manorial landed property. But there was not a trace of this in the Kerensky period" (between the February and October Revolutions)⁽¹⁾. The question of land ownership which he described as "the basis of the bourgeois revolution" could not be solved under bourgeois rule. "The dictatorship of the proletariat appeared on the scene not after the completion of the agrarian democratic revolution but as the necessary pre-requisite for its accomplishment", he argued⁽²⁾. Hence his theory of "permanent revolution" is validated! Q.E.D.

The flaw in Trotsky's superficially plausible reasoning, here as often elsewhere, is his inflation of secondary factors (though they may be very important ones) to such an extent that they overshadow and obscure the essence of a question. Lenin, on the other hand, with the minimum of flourish, always seized hold of the crux of a matter. "The transfer of state power from one class to another class", he wrote in April 1917, "is the first, the principal the basic sign of a revolution, both in the strictly scientific and in the practical political meaning of the term. To this extent, the bourgeois, or the bourgeois-democratic, revolution has been completed".⁽³⁾ This remained the essence of the position, even though some of the attributes usually held to belong to such a revolution were absent as they were in the case of other countries' bourgeois revolutions.⁽⁴⁾ Thus the February Revolution, which overthrew Tsarism, brought about a democratic republic and made Russia "the freest of all the belligerent countries in the world",⁽⁵⁾ failed to give the land to the peasants. It required the October Revolution, establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat, to carry out those bourgeois-democratic tasks which had not been tackled or completed between February and October. But this did not mean that the February Revolution was not a bourgeois-democratic revolution (Trotsky does not attempt to deny this⁽⁶⁾) nor that the

1. Trotsky, Permanent Revolution, p. 103.

2. ibid., p. 109. Trotsky's emphasis.

3. Lenin, S.W., VI, p. 33. Lenin's Emphasis.

4. See ibid., p. 501.

5. ibid., p. 32.

6. See, e.g., L. Trotsky, The Lessons of October (London, 1925), p. 21.

His qualification that it "came too late to have any stability" and "was full of contradictions" does not detract from this. His statement (p. 28) that "considering February by itself, and not as a step towards October, it meant no more than this - that Russia had advanced to the position of, let us say, the bourgeois republic of France" itself indicates the measure of the advance made from the oppressive and semi-feudal conditions under the Tsarist autocracy. In fact Lenin put the position more correctly when he wrote in April 1917 that this revolution "has gone farther than the ordinary bourgeois-democratic revolution, but has not yet reached a 'pure' dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry". (S.W., VI, p. 49. Emphasis in original.)

October Revolution was not a Socialist one. What the latter did was, in Lenin's words, to solve "the problems of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in passing, as a 'by-product' of the main and real proletarian-revolutionary Socialist work".⁽¹⁾ If Lenin had believed in "pure" revolutions Trotsky would be right to argue that the experience of 1917 upset the Bolshevik prognoses. In reality, however, Lenin never entertained any such naive new. "In concrete historical circumstances", he wrote in 1905 in his Two Tactics, "the elements of the past become interwoven with those of the future, the two paths get mixed.... Surely we all draw the distinction between bourgeois revolution and Socialist revolution, we all absolutely insist on the necessity of drawing a strict line between them; but can it be denied that in history certain particular elements of both revolutions become interwoven?... Will not the future Socialist revolution in Europe still have to do a great deal that has been left undone in the field of democracy?"⁽²⁾ Whilst in this period Lenin spoke of the beginning of the struggle for the Socialist revolution following a "complete victory" of the democratic revolution with "the achievement of the demands of the present-day peasantry"⁽³⁾ and undoubtedly did not expect the Socialist revolution to follow within eight months of its democratic precursor⁽⁴⁾, he considered the main factor determining the point of transition from one to the other to be "the degree of our strength, the strength of the class conscious and organised proletariat."⁽⁵⁾ History proved that he was right to reject Trotsky's strategy which envisaged essentially a leap from Tsarism to October skipping February.

When Trotsky and his adherents claim that Lenin discarded the formula of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry which he had allegedly "acknowledged to be without value"⁽⁶⁾ they are right - but only, as we have seen, with respect to Russia where its value as an objective was superseded after the bourgeois revolution of February 1917 had already realised it in its broad essentials! When they want us to believe that Lenin came over to Trotsky's position in April 1917 they are right - but only insofar as the similarity of their positions was brought about by the arrival

1. S.W., VI, p. 503. (Lenin's emphasis) Only in this context is it possible to understand Lenin's statement, quoted by Trotsky (Permanent Revolution, p. 106), that "down to the Summer and even the Autumn of 1918, our revolution was to a large extent a bourgeois revolution". (S.W., VIII, p. 37). Lenin meant in particular that in these early months of Soviet power a large place was given to carrying out the bourgeois task of giving the land to the peasants for individual cultivation. This was however subsidiary to the essentially Socialist tasks of the revolution.

2. S.W., III, p. 100.

3. ibid., p. 547.

4. A clinging to these assumptions led many Old Bolsheviks to continue to adhere to the aim of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry immediately after the February Revolution and initially to oppose Lenin when he returned to Russia in April and urged the Party to pass over to the stage of struggle for a Socialist revolution.

5. S.W., III, p. 145

6. L. Trotsky, Introduction to H. Isaacs, Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution (London, 1938), p. xxi.

at a stage that Trotsky had thought "unrealisable"⁽¹⁾ and had envisaged skipping! In his "colossal arrogance"⁽²⁾ Trotsky appears genuinely to have believed that the Bolshevik Party had become "de-bolshevised"⁽³⁾ and, on this basis, he moved towards joining it.

The stage now opening up was to resemble in many striking ways the picture that he had drawn in 1906 of the next Russian revolution. This far-sightedness was remarkable, but alas! - as with his predictions of a one-man Party dictatorship most inappropriately directed at Lenin which were three decades later to be realised ... by Stalin! - in enabling him to see unusually clearly the features of the mountains lying in the distance, it led him to miss the range ahead that had first to be crossed.

Trotsky however did not stop to analyse his error. He was concerned only to excuse it. Thus in 1924 in The Lessons of October, he argued that the revolutionary strikes - developing in St. Petersburg on the eve of the First World War held out the prospect of a victorious revolution in which "in all probability ... the overthrow of the Tsar would have been the signal for the seizure of power by the revolutionary Soviets" led by the Bolsheviks⁽⁴⁾. What prevented the realisation of such an immediate passage to the dictatorship of the proletariat predicted by Trotsky? The outbreak of the war diverted the movement and created "special circumstances ... that threw the conduct of the revolution into the hands of the petty bourgeois revolutionaries" due to the emergence of a peasant army of many millions⁽⁵⁾. Yet the war (with the inevitable appearance in a peasant country like Russia of a huge peasant army) was not some unforeseeable historical accident. It was the direct result of imperialist contradictions that had for years been inexorably preparing such a conflict with the resulting peasant, as well as working-class, discontent, without which there would undoubtedly have been no Bolshevik victory in 1917. What is more, as we have already seen, Trotsky continued in the war - in Lenin's words - to "repeat his 'original' theory of 1905 and refuses to stop to think why, for ten whole years, life passed by this beautiful theory."⁽⁶⁾.

Strange to relate, nowhere in any of Lenin's writings and speeches in the period from April 1917 till his death (they take up twenty-three of the fifty-five volumes of the new full Russian edition) has it been possible to find so much as a hint that Lenin was aware of his "conversion" to Trotsky's view of "permanent

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1. L. Trotsky, Results and Prospects, p. 205.
 2. A. A. Lunacharsky, Revolutionary Silhouettes (London, 1967), p. 62.
 3. Quoted in Deutscher, The Prophet Armed, p. 258.
 4. Trotsky, The Lessons of October, pp. 23-24.
 5. ibid., pp. 22-23.
 6. Lenin, S.W., V, p. 162.

revolution"⁽¹⁾ - and Lenin was never afraid of admitting past mistakes! On the other hand, we do find Trotsky on more than one occasion admitting the converse! Thus the 1927 Platform of the Left Opposition, republished in Britain by the S.L.L.'s publishing house who advertise it as "a landmark in the development of 20th Century Marxism", reproduces the declaration of Trotsky and his associates to the Communist International on 15 December, 1926: "Trotsky has stated to the International that in all those questions of principle upon which he disputed with Lenin, Lenin was right - and particularly upon the question of permanent revolution and the peasantry."⁽²⁾ In a letter to the old "Left Oppositionist" Preobrazhensky, who did not accept his theory, Trotsky admitted: "Up to February 1917, the slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry was historically progressive."⁽³⁾ And even in his Lessons of October he wrote that with his formula of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry Lenin had been attacking the question of an advance towards the Socialist dictatorship of the proletariat, supported by the peasants, in a "forcible and thoroughly revolutionary way"⁽⁴⁾ - in complete contradiction to his 1909 statement that "the anti-revolutionary features of Bolshevism threaten to become a great danger ... in the event the victory of the revolution."⁽⁵⁾

However we are tempted to conclude that there was an element of "diplomacy" in such statements which are flatly contradicted by many others, such as the approving prefaces, written after the revolution to pre-revolutionary works, where his theory is re-stated, and most notably by his book, The Permanent Revolution. The latter, written in 1928 in reply to criticism of his theory by Radek, another of his supporters at that time, attempts to provide a full-length vindication of his position as against Lenin's and, on occasion, to argue that the differences between the two "had a secondary and subordinate significance."⁽⁶⁾

The significance of this question is not confined to a historical assessment of Trotsky's role in the Russian labour movement up to 1917. We have devoted so much attention to it because his theory of "permanent revolution" developed at that time was,

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1. It is not possible to take very seriously - in view of this and of the nature of the case - the one bit of "evidence" offered by Trotsky on this point: the statement by his boundlessly devoted but neurotic supporter, Yoffe, to the effect that he had heard Lenin saying that Trotsky had been politically right ever since 1905. Yoffe wrote this in 1927 in a farewell letter designed for posthumous publication just before, desperately sick with polyneuritis and tuberculosis, he committed suicide as a dramatic protest against Trotsky's expulsion from the Party. (See L. Trotsky, My Life, New York 1960, p. 537. For information on Yoffe, see Deutscher, The Prophet Armed, p. 193).
 2. The Platform of the Left Opposition, (London, 1963), p. 102. My emphasis.
 3. Bulletin of Marxist Studies, (New York, n.d.) No. 1. The Chinese Revolution, by L. Trotsky, p. 21. Preobrazhensky's brief letter to Trotsky (p. 19) powerfully challenges his theory of "permanent revolution" as applied to both Russia and China.
 4. The Lessons of October, pp. 20-21.
 5. The Permanent Revolution, p. 112.
 6. ibid., p. 110.

as we shall see, to determine all major Trotskyist policies in the future whether it be in relation to the building of Socialism in the Soviet Union, the whole question of allies for the labour movement involved in the strategy of the Popular Front and the resistance movements against Fascism, or the "general trend of revolutionary development in all backward countries" which, according to the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International drafted by in 1938, "can be determined by the formula of the permanent revolution in the sense definitely imparted to it by the three revolutions in Russia."⁽¹⁾ However, although this theory, on which there had been no agreement among Trotsky's supporters in Russia, had now ossified into a basic programmatic commitment for all Trotskyist groups, at the 1958 Fifth World Congress of the Fourth International the Report on the Colonial Revolution was to reveal that "some comrades have wondered whether the theory of the permanent revolution ... did not reveal certain lacunae, whether it might not be necessary to render it more flexible, and whether there might not have been some errors committed on this subject."⁽²⁾

Trotsky in the October Revolution

Arriving back in Russia in March, 1917, Trotsky first joined a left-wing group called the Mezhrayontsi with whom, in July, he entered the Bolshevik Party. The next month he was elected as a member of the Party's Central Committee and in September as the President of the Petrograd Soviet in which the Bolsheviks had won a majority. In this period he played an enormously positive role as the Party's spokesman in the Soviets and at mass meetings of workers, soldiers and sailors who were inspired and electrified by his revolutionary oratory. In the floodtide of revolution he rose to his fullest stature placing his outstanding talents at the service of the Bolshevik Party and transcending for the moment the differences of former years. His role at this time was dramatically conveyed at first hand by John Reed in his epic "Ten Days that Shock the World", which Lenin hailed in his introduction as a "truthful and most vivid exposition." A fitting tribute to Trotsky's role was given by Joseph Stalin in Pravda on 6 November, 1918. "All practical work in connection with the organisation of the uprising", he wrote, "was done under the immediate direction of Comrade Trotsky, the President of the Petrograd Soviet. It can be stated with certainty that the Party is indebted primarily and principally to Comrade Trotsky for the rapid going over of the garrison to the side of the Soviet and the efficient manner in which the work of the Military-Revolutionary Committee was organised"⁽³⁾

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1. The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International, (London, 1963) p. 38.
 2. The Fourth International, (Paris), Winter, 1958, p. 27.
 3. J. Stalin, The October Revolution, (Moscow, 1934), p. 30.
(The passage has been inexcusably expunged from the text of the article published in Stalin's Works, Moscow, 1953, IV, p. 157.) This statement, made by Stalin only a year after the Revolution with the events still fresh in his mind, is more convincing than statements contradicting it that he was to make in later years when engaged in controversy with Trotsky. Nor do the attacks on Stalin for exaggerating Trotsky's role in his 1918 article that certain Soviet historians have made in recent years seem to me convincing. None have to the best of my knowledge ventured to offer an explanation as to what possible motive Stalin could have had for doing that.

In the years immediately following the victory of the Revolution Trotsky was to play a very active role in the leadership of the Soviet State and of the Russian Communist Party, as well as of the Third (Communist) International founded in 1919. As People's Commissar of War from 1918-1925 he played a key role in building up from out of the ruins of the old Tsarist army the heroic Red Army which, with five million men under arms, was to win the Civil War against the White Guard generals and to drive out the invading armies of fourteen hostile capitalist countries. The story is stirringly told, bringing out both Trotsky's mistakes (sometimes serious) and his achievements (which much out-weighed them) by Isaac Deutscher in the chapter "Arming the Republic" in The Prophet Armed. Speaking of Trotsky to the great Russian writer Maxim Gorky, Lenin was to express his admiration: "Show me another man", he said, thumping the table, "capable of organising in a year an almost exemplary army and moreover of winning the esteem of the military specialists".(1)

Yet, with all this, Lenin was still to view Trotsky with some reserve. "He isn't one of us", he told Gorky. "With us, but not of us. He is ambitious. There is something of Lassalle in him, something which isn't good."(2)

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, 1918.

Although Trotsky had supported Lenin against the opposition of Zinoviev and Kamenev on the need to organise an insurrection in October 1917 he was to find himself at loggerheads with him at the beginning of 1918 on the signing of a peace treaty with Germany. The way he acted on this question highlights both his strengths and his weaknesses.

As the first Commissar of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet State, which had declared its intention of withdrawing from the world war, Trotsky had gone to Brest-Litovsk to lead the Soviet delegation negotiating for a peace treaty with representatives of Germany and the Central Powers. He had used the negotiations, carried out in public, as a forum for denouncing all the imperialist powers. His powerful speeches undoubtedly helped to strengthen anti-war feeling in all countries. On the other hand, when faced with the harsh terms demanded by the Germans, overestimation of the immediate revolutionary prospects in the West overshadowed his appreciation of the reality of the situation and led him to refuse to sign the treaty.

Lenin, on the other hand, stressed that the Germans had the whiplash and that the war-weary, ill-equipped and hungry Russian troops could not hold out against their powerful military machine. He therefore urged accepting the German terms, humiliating as he considered them to be, as soon as the Germans presented an ultimatum, warning that the alternative would be that the Germans would advance further into Soviet territory and impose even worse terms.

1. M. Gorki, Lenine et le Paysan Russe (Paris, 1924), p. 95.

2. M. Gorky, Days with Lenin, (London, n.d.), p. 57. Lassalle was a prominent German Socialist leader of the last century whom Marx criticised for his opportunism, egotism and ambition, but whose "immortal service" he recognised in forming an independent workers' party in 1863.

"Yes, we shall see the world revolution, but for the time being it is a very good fairy-tale, a very beautiful fairy tale", he argued. "If the revolution breaks out, everything is saved. Of course! But if it does not turn out as we desire, if it does not achieve victory tomorrow - what then? Then the masses will say to you, you acted like gamblers - you staked everything on a fortunate turn of events that did not take place, you proved unfitted for the situation that actually arose instead of the world revolution, which will inevitably come, but which has not yet reached maturity."⁽¹⁾

Trotsky said that signing the treaty was treachery in the full sense of the word.⁽²⁾ He succeeded at first in obtaining a 9-7 majority in the Party Central Committee for his formula "neither war nor peace", and predicted that the Germans would be "unable to make an offensive against us."⁽³⁾ In fact shortly afterwards the Germans mounted an extremely successful offensive, facing the Soviet government with the necessity of making peace on much worse terms than those originally proposed. Even then he opposed Lenin's urgent plea to accept the German terms. When it came to the vote in the Central Committee, however, he and his supporters abstained, giving Lenin a 9-4 majority after the latter had threatened to resign from the government and the Central Committee if "the policy of beautiful revolutionary phrases continued."⁽⁴⁾ At the same time Trotsky resigned from his post as Commissar of Foreign Affairs.⁽⁵⁾

Speaking in March 1918 at the Party Congress that debated the treaty, Lenin showed why Trotsky's "revolutionary phrase, 'The Germans cannot attack', from which the other phrase ('We can declare the state of war terminated. Neither war nor the signing of peace') derived, was such a profound mistake, such a bitter overestimation of events."⁽⁶⁾ What he had predicted had come true. "Instead of the Brest peace we have a much more humiliating peace, and the blame for this rests upon those who refused to accept the former peace", he said. These people were "assisting German imperialism", because they had "surrendered wealth valued at millions in guns and shells; and anybody who had seen the state - the incredible state - of the army could have predicted this."⁽⁷⁾

Trotsky was to admit in a speech in October 1918 that he had been wrong and Lenin had been right over the Treaty.⁽⁸⁾ However, like his followers⁽⁹⁾, he was concerned in later years to play down the erroneous position he took on this question, referring merely

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1. Lenin, The Revolutionary Phrase, pp. 85-86.
 2. Ibid., p. 97.
 3. Quoted by Deutscher, Prophet Armed, p. 379.
 4. Les Bolcheviks et la Revolution d'Octobre: Proces verbaux du Comite Central, aout 1917-fevrier 1918 (Paris, 1964), pp. 287-294.
 5. Ibid., p. 290.
 6. The Revolutionary Phrase, p. 81
 7. Ibid., p. 86.
 8. L. Trotsky, My Life, (New York, 1960), pp. 393-4.
 9. See, e.g., G. Gale in Newsletter, 27 November, 1965, who refuse to admit that Trotsky's opposition to Lenin's demand to accept the German peace terms led to Russia ending up in a worse position.

to "some practical and empirical differences with Lenin - no more."(1) In fact what was involved was Trotsky's lifelong tendency to allow his appraisal of a concrete situation to be blurred by wishful thinking and infatuation with "the revolutionary phrase".

Trotsky and Bureaucracy. 1920-24.

Trotsky is presented by his supporters as the champion of the struggle against bureaucracy in the Soviet Union.(2) Since during the last seventeen years of his life Trotsky was tireless in his denunciations of many aspects of Stalin's bureaucratic regime that the Soviet Communist Party was to unmask in 1956, the Trotskyist claim appears plausible. However, as we shall see, the truth is considerably more complex.

(a) The Trade Union Controversy. 1920-21

In the first big Party discussion after the Revolution involving the problem of bureaucracy Trotsky clashed head on with the majority of the Bolshevik Central Committee. Lenin strongly criticised his policy of "bureaucratically nagging the trade unions"(3) as expressing "the worst in military experience"(4), and containing "a number of errors that are connected with the very essence of the dictatorship of the proletariat".(5)

Since the end of 1919 Trotsky had only been giving a minor part of his time to military affairs. Entering the field of economic reconstruction, he proceeded to apply methods from the military field. He placed great emphasis on the militarisation and compulsion of labour which, he told the Ninth Party Congress in March 1920, "would reach the highest degree of intensity during the transition from capitalism to Socialism." Speaking to the trade unions he even went so far as to declare: "The militarisation of labour ... is the indispensable basic method for the organisation of our labour forces Is it true that compulsory labour is always unproductive?... This is the most wretched and miserable liberal prejudice: chattel slavery, too, was productive ... Compulsory serf labour did not grow out of the feudal lords' ill-will. It was (in its time) a progressive phenomenon".(6) In 1920 in addition to his job as Commissar of War, he had taken over the Department of Transport, of vital economic and military importance. Placing the railwaymen and the workers in the railway repair workshops under marital law, he met the objections of the railwaymen's union by dismissing its leaders and appointing others more

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1. The Case of Leon Trotsky (London, 1937), p. 51.
 2. See, e.g., Tom Kemp, "Trotsky's Struggle against Bureaucracy", in Fourth International (London), November 1967, which - understandably! - starts its chronological presentation of Trotsky's views only with December 1923.
 3. S.W., IX, p. 27.
 4. Ibid., p. 23.
 5. Ibid., p. 7.
 6. Quoted by I. Deutscher, The Prophet Armed, pp. 499, 501.

compliant in their place. He did the same with other transport workers' unions. His efforts brought results: the railways were restored ahead of schedule.

Carried away by this success, he went on to propose that other trade unions should be likewise "sand-papered" or "shaken up." He met with the opposition of the Central Committee which called on the Party to resist "militarised and bureaucratic forms of work"(1) and particularly of Lenin who criticised "the irregularities and bureaucratic excesses of the Cectran"(2), the Central Transport Commission that Trotsky headed. Unabashed Trotsky hit back. He defended his practice of overruling the trade unionists, spoke of "selecting the leading personnel" for them⁽³⁾ as against a democratic method of election and flayed those who protested that a new bureaucracy was using Tsarist methods. Russia, he argued repeatedly, suffered not from the excess but from the lack of an efficient bureaucracy, to which he favoured giving certain limited privileges. Reporting this, Deutscher comments: "He thus made himself the spokesman of the managerial groups".(4)

When the Central Committee set up a commission to consider the problems of the trade unions and elected Trotsky to it, he refused to work on it. "This step alone causes Comrade Trotsky's original mistake to become magnified and later to lead to factionalism", declared Lenin.(5) Organising a faction around the ideas expressed in his pamphlet, The Role and Tasks of the Trade Unions (of which Lenin said: "I am astonished at the number of theoretical errors and crying inexactitudes that are concentrated in it"⁽⁶⁾), he launched a debate in the Party culminating at the Tenth Congress in March 1921 in his overwhelming defeat and a decision to ban factions in the Party.(7) Adopting what Lenin called "the administrator's approach"(8), Trotsky wanted the trade unions to be deprived of their autonomy and incorporated into the state apparatus. Their leaders would represent the state to the workers rather than vice versa, concentrating on production and labour discipline, for, he argued, they could not logically defend

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1. Ibid., p. 502
 2. S.W., IX, p. 29.
 3. Quoted by Lenin, S.W., IX, pp. 63-4.
 4. Prophet Armed, p. 503.
 5. S.W., IX, p. 30. Emphasis in original.
 6. Ibid., p. 3.
 7. See Ibid., pp. 131-134. By factions were understood "groups with separate platforms striving to separate themselves to a certain extent and to create their own group discipline." (p. 131). Trotsky at the 13th Party Congress in 1924 was to dissociate himself from a statement of his supporters by denying that he was in favour of either factions or groups in the Party, saying that it was "impossible to make any distinction between a faction and a group." (13 s'ezd R.K.P.b., Moscow, 1924, p. 165). His statements in later years, not to speak of his practice, were however to contradict this denial.
 8. S.W., IX, p. 70.

the workers against the workers' state.(1)

Lenin answered that Trotsky (to whom he ascribed "one-sidedness, infatuation, exaggeration and obstinacy" (2) was fundamentally mistaken. His error consisted in dealing with "abstractions" (3), and speaking all the time about "general principle" instead of making a detailed study of the specific situation. (4) (A characteristic failing of Trotsky's, as we saw over Brest-Litovsk.) In practice, said Lenin, the Soviet state was "a workers' state with bureaucratic distortions." (5) For a long time, he argued, the trade unions would need to engage in "struggle against the bureaucratic distortions of the Soviet apparatus" and for "the protection of the material and spiritual interests of the masses of the toilers by the ways and means that this apparatus cannot employ". (6)

Lenin's critical attitude to Trotsky for considering such basic questions from a bureaucratic-administrative rather than a Marxist political point of view was reflected in his final assessment of him in his "testament" written in December 1922: "Personally he is perhaps the most capable man in the present Central Committee, but he has too enterprising self-assurance and excessive enthusiasm for the purely administrative side of the work." (7)

(b) Theses on Industry (1923)

At the 12th Party Congress in April 1923 Trotsky was authorised to present his views on the development of industry as a statement of Party policy. (8) Although there was much in his report that was the product of

Later Trotsky was to argue that he formulated these views purely in the context of the special conditions of "War Communism" after the rejection of proposals he had made in 1920 to modify this by introducing incentive payments. (My Life, pp.463-6). However, at the Tenth Congress, when "War Communism" was replaced by the New Economic Policy that was to go further than Trotsky's proposals of the previous year, he maintained that his proposals for the militarisation of labour remained valid and that they were not necessarily connected with "War Communism". (see The Prophet Armed, p. 497).

Ibid., p. 72.

Ibid., p. 9.

Ibid., pp. 6-7.

Ibid., p. 9.

Ibid., p. 73.

V.I.Lenin, Letter to the Congress, (Moscow, n.d.). p.11.

His Theses on Industry, but not the report with which he introduced them, appeared in Labour Monthly (London), July and August 1923.

report that was the product of fruitful collective discussion in the Party leadership, his approach was, once again, that of the administrator who subordinates immediate considerations of workers' rights and livelihood to longer-term economic targets. (1) (It is at least to Trotsky's credit that - unlike Stalin later - he was quite open about what he had in mind.) Having proposed the concentration of industry in a small number of large and efficient firms (with the inevitable corollary of loss of jobs by workers in the firms shut down) he argued that the working class would have to shoulder the main burden of industrial construction. "There may be moments", he said, "when the government pays you no wages, or when it pays you only half your wage and when you, the worker, have to lend (the other half) to the state." (2)

(c) The 1923-24 Opposition

In the last period of his working life Lenin was desperately concerned about the growth of bureaucracy in the Soviet state apparatus and in the Party. In 1923, as he lay incapacitated on his death bed (he died in January 1924), this question was discussed in the Party leadership which, with Trotsky's participation, drew up a resolution - unanimously adopted on 5 December 1923 - spot-

lighting the "bureaucratisation of the Party apparatus and the danger arising from it of the detachment of the masses from the Party," and calling for the development of freedom for open Party debate and discussion.(3)

Trotsky provoked a fierce controversy by following this up with a letter and a series of articles that appeared in Pravda and which, together with some new material, he published as a pamphlet entitled The New Course, which stimulated the formation and activity of a Trotskyist Left Opposition in the Party from 1923-24. Although its overall approach is rather negative, there is much which can be seen to have been right in its attacks on the growth and power of the Party apparatus under Stalin's control(4) especially in view of what we now know of the gross abuses, violating the very essence of Socialist democracy and legality, in which this was to result. It is therefore understandable that, after the revelations of the Twentieth Congress, some comrades should have been drawn to Trotskyism through this democratic and anti-bureaucratic strain which was to occupy an important place in all Trotsky's subsequent writings on Russia. The New Course, in particular, contains trenchant Marxist criticisms of the methods of Stalinist bureaucracy and a plea for involving young people in the struggle for "a vibrant and active democracy inside the

1. What is, of course, necessary in building Socialism is to find an acceptable balance between the two.

2. Quoted by I. Deutscher, The Prophet Unarmed, pp. 101-2.

3. Die Kommunistische Partei der Sowjetunion in Resolutionen und Beschlüssen der Parteitage, Konferenzen und Plenaren des Z.K. (Berlin, 1957), pp. 251, 253.

4. In his "Testament", Lenin had warned that "Comrade Stalin, having become General Secretary, has concentrated boundless authority in his hands, and I am not sure whether he will always be capable of using that authority with sufficient caution." (Letter to the Congress, p. 11.)

Party" (1) that are of lasting value.

Russian Communists could not, however, so soon forget that the methods of leadership that Trotsky was now criticising so effectively were very much akin to those of which he had been the principal exponent so shortly before. There seemed to be a conflict between his precept when in opposition and his practice when in office. Stalin was therefore able to ring a bell with many people when he referred to Trotsky as "this patriarch of bureaucrats" and accused the Opposition of trying "to wrest the initiative from the Central Committee and get astride the hobby-horse of democracy".(2) Moreover, his approach to economic questions, discussed above was at variance with his plea for greater workers' democracy. As Deutscher correctly notes: "The workers could not be expected to surrender voluntarily 'half their wages' to the state, as Trotsky urged them to do, in order to promote national investment. The State could take 'half their wages' only force: and to do this it had to deprive them of every means of protest and to destroy the last vestiges of a workers' democracy. The two aspects of the programme which Trotsky expounded in 1923 were to prove incompatible in the near future; and therein lay the fundamental weakness of his position." (3)

The Building of Socialism in Russia

In 1926-27 Trotsky headed an Opposition in the Soviet Communist Party that fought on the major questions of home and international policy. After a nation-wide Party discussion the Opposition was defeated by 724,000 votes to 4,000 with 2,600 abstentions. At the end of 1927 Trotsky was expelled from the Soviet Union for "anti-Soviet activity" and in 1932 deprived of Soviet citizenship. From his successive places of exile - Turkey,

Norway, France, and....

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1. L. Trotsky, The New Course (London, 1956) p.24. After the Twentieth Congress Gerry Healey's publishing house brought out this new English edition of the pamphlet to promote a big drive to recruit members of the Communist Party and the Y.C.L. His group was not without success at the time, but almost every single person that his group recruited then subsequently left it, often with recriminations about the bureaucratic methods that they found there.
 2. Stalin, Works (Moscow, 1953), pp.28-29.
 3. The Prophet Unarmed, p.151. I must make it clear, however, that - despite such criticisms as this which I have quoted in this article - Isaac Deutscher's overall appraisal of Trotsky's role in this and in other spheres is a predominantly positive one. (See his introduction to The Age of Permanent Revolutions A Trotsky Anthology, New York, 1964, his Preface to The Prophet Unarmed, and his Postscript to The Prophet Outcast.) He was however, much too fine a Marxist historian to let his sympathies for Trotsky affect the rigid objectivity with which he presented each episode in Trotsky's life in his Trotsky trilogy, which is one of the great biographies of our time.

finally, Mexico, where he was murdered in 1940 (1) - Trotsky wrote many books, pamphlets and articles and continued to try to build up a left opposition to Stalin. At the heart of these disputes lay the question of Socialism in One Country.

(a) The Debate on Socialism in One Country

The great historical controversy on the possibility of building Socialism in Russia is still today befogged on both sides by decades - old distortions and misrepresentations. Thus, the one side Trotskyists present Stalin as having from 1924, when he first formulated his theory, counterposed Socialism in One Country to the spread of revolution to other countries. On the other side Soviet histories still present Trotsky's opposition to Stalin's theory as opposition to Socialist Industrialisation in the Soviet Union (2) and in favour of an export of revolution by force of arms. Both versions are equally false.

Stalin's argument was that the spread of revolution to the West was obviously the most desirable thing, but that with the delay in this Russia had no alternative but to set itself the aim of building Socialism in the belief that she had all that was necessary to complete this. "The very development of the world revolution", he argued in December 1924, "the very process of separating a number of additional countries from the imperialist states, will be all the quicker and more thoroughgoing in proportion as Socialism shall have struck root in the first victorious country, in proportion as that country shall have transformed itself into the base whence the development of world revolution can proceed, in proportion as that country shall have become the crowbar getting a solid grip and setting the whole structure of imperialism rocking ... It is more than likely that, in the course of the development of the world revolution, there will come into existence - side by side with the centres of imperialism in the various capitalist lands and with the system of these lands throughout the world - centres of Socialism in various Soviet countries (3), and a system of these centres throughout the world. As the outcome of this development, there will ensue a struggle between the rival systems, and its history will be the history of the world revolution ... Those who, forgetting the international character of the October Revolution, declare the victory of the revolution in one country to be simply and solely a national phenomenon, are wrong." (4) The course of revolutions in the world, which today sees a growing Socialist camp challenging the old imperialist one, has in no small measure confirmed Stalin's broad perspective.

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1. The evidence points strongly to the assassin, Mercader or "Jacson", who posed as a disillusioned follower of Trotsky, having in fact acted on behalf of Stalin and the G.P.U. After completing his 20-year jail sentence he left Mexico on a Czechoslovak plane for an undisclosed destination.
 2. See History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, (Moscow, 1960), pp. 396, 409.
 3. Stalin did not mean countries belonging to Soviet Russia, but countries which followed the Russian lead in setting up Soviets (Councils of Workers and Peasants) which would win power.
 4. J. Stalin, Leninism, (London, 1928), pp. 214-216; Works (Moscow, 1953), pp. 418-420.

Trotsky, for his part, never disputed the need to start the job of building up Socialism in Russia. Indeed in 1923-24 he called for the introduction of central planning and in 1925-27 advanced proposals for an ambitious programme of industrialisation that earned him the reputation of being a "super-industrialiser." (1) Further, he opposed any export of revolution, declaring in 1924: "We are not inclined to launch into bloody enterprises for the purpose of deciding piecemeal the question of the liberation of all Europe ... It will be decided sooner or later. Our tasks in this period is to strengthen our economy and to raise the level of our culture, holding on until emancipated Europe's workers come to our aid." (2)

Trotsky's rejection of the possibility of completing the building of Socialism in Russia without the victory of revolution in the West sprang from his theory of "permanent revolution" that we have discussed above (3). It was in fact basically an expression

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1. I cannot in the scope of this article examine the question of how far these proposals corresponded to the real economic possibilities existing at the time they were advanced. It is one of the myths of vulgar Trotskyism that the implementation by Stalin after 1928 of more far-reaching plans than had been put forward by the Opposition in itself proves that the latter was correct. As Maurice Dobb writes, "it does not follow that what may have been practicable in 1928-29 was necessarily practicable at an earlier date when both industry and agriculture were weaker". (M. Dobb, Soviet Economic Development since 1917, London, 1948, pp. 206-7. See also, R.W. Davies, "The Inadequacies of Russian Trotskyism", in Labour Review (London), July-August, 1957. However, I would accept the argument that, if the Party had heeded earlier the Opposition's warnings against the dangerous growth in the power of the Kulaks (rich peasants) in the countryside, the process of collectivisation in 1929-30 could have been less violent. As against this, though, the Trotskyists' economic policies favouring the exploitation of the countryside by the town through a system of price differentials which would keep up the price of industrial products at the expense of agricultural prices (see, e.g., The New Economics, by Preobrazhensky, the Opposition's chief economist) anticipated theoretically much of the approach to the peasantry that from 1929 Stalin was to apply in practice.
 2. L. Trotsky, "Young People, Study Politics", in Fourth International (London), January, 1966, p. 34. Curiously enough, Trotsky was being reproached in Soviet histories in the early '30's for his opposition in 1920 to the Red Army's advance on Warsaw, said to have been "due to a Social-Democratic prejudice to the effect that it was wrong to carry revolution into a country from the outside". (N. Popov, Outline History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, New York, Part II, n.d.) p. 101.
 3. See, especially quotations 6, 8 and 9 on page 10.

of his disbelief in the ability of the Soviet Union even to survive as a workers' state if the revolution did not spread to more advanced countries.

Thus, in The Programme of Peace, published as a programmatic pamphlet in June 1917 and republished with a postscript in 1922 and 1924, he wrote of the Socialist revolution in Russia: "Without waiting for the others we begin and we continue the struggle on our own national soil in complete certainty that our initiative will provide the impulse for the struggle in other countries; and if this were not so, then it would be hopeless to think - as is borne out both by historical experience and theoretical considerations - that revolutionary Russia, for example, would be able to maintain herself in the face of conservative Europe, or that Socialist Germany could remain isolated in a capitalist world." (1)

In 1937 the theme was essentially the same: Without a more or less rapid victory of the proletariat in the advanced countries the workers' government in Russia will not survive. Left to itself the Soviet regime must either fall or degenerate. More exactly it will first degenerate and then fall. I myself have written about this more than once, beginning in 1905." (2)

Trotsky's underestimation of the internal forces of Russian socialism was shown particularly in his lack of confidence in the independent development of a socialist economy in the U.S.S.R. In his 1922 Postscript to his Programme of Peace, he wrote: "Socialism is conceivable only on the basis of the productive forces' growth and blossoming ... So long as the bourgeoisie remain in power in other European states we are compelled, in the struggle against economic isolation, to seek agreements with the capitalist world; at the same time it can be stated with certainty that these agreements, in the best case, will help us to heal this or that economic wound, make this or that step forward, but the genuine rise of Socialist economy in Russia will become possible only after the victory of the proletariat in the most important countries of Europe." (3)

In 1927 we find him asserting that the Soviet state was, "directly or indirectly, under the relative control of the world market. Herein lies the root of the question. The rate of development is not an arbitrary one; it is determined by the whole of world development because in the last analysis world industry controls every one of its parts, even if that part is under the proletarian dictatorship and is building up socialist industry." (4) In his criticism of the Draft Programme of the Comintern the next year, he went even further: "To the extent that productivity of labour and the productivity of a social system as a whole are measured in the market by the correlation of prices", he wrote, "it is not so much military intervention as the intervention of cheaper capitalist commodities that constitutes perhaps the greatest immediate menace to Soviet economy. (5) The monopoly of foreign trade, which Stalin and the Party majority correctly stressed was the means of the Soviet Union shielding itself from,

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1. L. Trotsky 'The Programme of Peace', (Colombo, 1956), p. 18
 2. L. Trotsky 'Stalinism and Bolshevism' (London, 1956), p. 9. (Emphasis in original)
 3. 'The Programme of Peace', pp. 20-21.
 4. 'Where is Trotsky Going?' (London, 1928), pp. 53-54.
 5. L. Trotsky, 'The Third International After Lenin' (New York, 1957), p. 47.

such economic subversion, became for Trotsky "evidence of the severity and the dangerous character of our dependence." (1) In this connection he saw the fate of world economy as a whole as of "decisive significance" as against the subsidiary significance of Russia's Socialist construction. (2) And he went on with the utmost defeatism to suggest the possibility of the productivity of labour growing faster in the predominant capitalist countries than in Russia. (3)

The fiasco of this approach was proved by the successes of the Soviet Five Year Plans. Old revolutionary that he was, Trotsky could scarce forebear to cheer in 1936 when he viewed "the vast scope of industrialisation in the Soviet Union, as against a background of stagnation and decline in almost all of the capitalist world" that emerged from the comparative indices of industrial production. (4) But, alas! when noting that "it is impossible to deny the fact that even now the forces of production in the Soviet Union are developing at a tempo such as no other country in the world has even experienced or is experiencing now," (5) he was never to admit that this was a direct refutation of his pessimistic predictions of the late 'twenties, which in their turn contrasted strangely with the super-industrialisation proposals he had advanced at an earlier period. (It is the latter that are always pointed to by Trotsky's followers nowadays, whilst the former are conveniently forgotten.) Least of all was he to attempt a Marxist analysis of the source of his errors - a practice that he was always most ready to demand of his political adversaries! Rather was he to draw the strange conclusion that these successes, though signifying that "the technical premise for Socialism has made an enormous stride forward", were not leading Soviet society towards Socialism but in the direction of "the regeneration of classes, the liquidation of planned economy, and the restoration of capitalist property", in which case, he added, "the state will inevitably become Fascist." (6)

Isaac Deutscher has likened the essence of the argument over Socialism in one country in the 'twenties to a dispute about whether it would be possible to cover with a roof a building in which both sides were in favour of starting work, being already in agreement on its shape and the materials to be used. (7) Isolated from the undercurrents expressing differences of mood and emphasis that lay behind the heat that it generated, such a debate appears highly scholastic. Apparently conscious of this, the New International, the leading American Trotskyist organ of the 'thirties, praised by Trotsky for its high theoretical level, openly expressed the

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1. Ibid., p.49 In a recent booklet, Ernest Germain of the Paris-based Fourth International ridicules Gerry Healy's associates who are nowadays using just such arguments as did Trotsky about the Soviet Union's subordination to the world market - and refers them to the efficacy of ... the monopoly of foreign trade! (E. Germain, Marxism versus Ultraleftism, Paris, 1967, pp. 69-71)
 2. L. Trotsky, 'Third International', p. 49
 3. Ibid.
 4. L. Trotsky, 'The Revolution Betrayed', (New York, 1957) pp. 6ff.
 5. L. Trotsky in Workers' International News (London) July 1938. p.1.
 6. Ibid., p.2.
 7. Isaac Deutscher, 'Stalin: A Political Biography', (London, 1959, pp. 286-7)

essence of the Trotskyist position as follows in an editorial dated 30th January 1935: "In the light of the present world situation, the theory of 'Socialism in one country', this gospel of the bureaucracy, stands before us in all its nationalistic limitation and its braggart falsity. We refer here, of course, not to the purely abstract possibility or impossibility of building a socialist society within this or another geographic area - such a theme is for scholiasts; we have in mind the vastly more immediate and concrete, living and historical, and not metaphysical question: Is it possible for an isolated Soviet state to maintain itself for an indeterminate period of time in an imperialist environment, within the constricting circle of Fascist counter-revolutions? The answer of Marxism is, No. The answer of the internal condition of the U.S.S.R. is, No Outside of the world revolution there is no salvation." (1)

If we accept the issue posed in this way, history has completely demolished the Trotskyist position. If, however, we define Socialism as Ernest Mandel does, as 'a society without classes, commodities, money and state' (2) then by the very terms of this definition we are led to a different conclusion. If we are going to make a meaningful estimate of Trotsky's political positions, we must avoid arbitrary definitions that take the issues out of their historical context and provoke idle semantic wrangles. The fact is that Mandel's definition is at variance with the Leninist conception that was generally accepted by the Russian Communist Party. In State and Revolution, Lenin wrote of Socialism as synonymous with Marx's first phase of Communism, representing the "conversion of the means of production into the common property of the whole of society." Socialism, he went on, "does not remove the defects of distribution and the inequality of 'bourgeois right' which continues to prevail as long as the products are divided 'according to the amount of work performed' The Socialist principle 'An equal amount of labour for an equal quantity of products is already realised there is still need for a state For the complete withering away of the state, complete Communism is necessary." (3) This distinction was amplified in The ABC of Communism by Bukharin and Preobrezhensky, which from 1919 had been the basic Party textbook. "In Socialist society, which is inevitable as an intermediate stage between capitalism and communism" they wrote, "money is needed for it has a part to play in commodity economy In Socialist society, this commodity economy will to some extent persist." (4) The society without commodities, money and state, which Mandel defines as Socialism, carries many of the characteristics that Party tradition identified with the higher stage of

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1. New International, March 1935, p.40.
 2. E.Mandel, New Left Review, No. 47, p. 42. This type of definition of Socialism is on a par with Trotsky's contention that Russia could not be said to have socialism till "the average productivity of every member of socialist society is higher, even substantially higher, than that of a capitalist worker". (L. Trotsky, New International, October 1935, p. 178)
 3. Lenin, Selected Works, VII. pp. 85-87. Italics in original. Cf. also Selected Works VIII, p.239. It is possible to find modifications of this definition of Socialism in certain other passages in Lenin, but those quoted here are the most typical.
 4. N. Bukharin and E. Preobrazhensky, An ABC of Communism (London 1924), pp. 345-6.

Communism. (1) It is a red herring for the purposes of this discussion, for it is not what Russian Communists understood when they set themselves the goal of creating a Socialist economy which they later claimed to have achieved. They understood Socialism essentially as Trotsky had defined it in 1906: "co-operative production on a large scale." (2)

(b) Was Socialism Achieved?

The idea that Russia should set the aim of completing the building of socialism on its own if the international revolution continued to be delayed did represent a departure from the traditional theory of the Bolsheviks, who had never foreseen their country finding itself as an isolated workers' state long enough for the question to arise. But, although it was never theoretically elaborated by Lenin, in the last period of his working life he was coming more and more in practice to adopt such a perspective. (3) It was perfectly in keeping with Marxist theory that, after his death, the Party should come to terms with the new situation and spell out its confidence that, as Lenin had said, "N.E.P. Russia will be transformed into Socialist Russia" since it possessed "all that is necessary and sufficient" for building a socialist society. (4)

What specifically did this perspective mean? Lenin had enumerated five elements constituting the socio-economic forms of existing in Russia after the October Revolution and into the period of the New Economic Policy (N.E.P.) of free trade in peasant produce, introduced in 1921; (i) patriarchal, largely self-sufficient peasant economy; (ii) small commodity production (including the majority of peasants selling their grain); (iii) private capitalism; (iv) state capitalism; and (v) Socialism. (5) The transition to socialism was seen as meaning the transformation of Russia from a backward peasant land into a country with a modern expanding and centrally-planned state industry and collective and state agriculture, going hand-in-hand with big educational and cultural advances. It meant the effective elimination of the first four of Lenin's socio-economic categories, entailing the disappearance of the kulaks (rural bourgeoisie) and the Nepmen (merchant capitalists), and a vast growth of the fifth, comprising State-owned industry and State farms, on

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1. Cf. J.P. Cannon, the veteran U.S. Trotskyist leader in his ABC of Trotskyism (London, 1945) which served as a basic textbook for English-speaking Trotskyists for many years: "I ... consider the terms Socialism and Communism interchangeable According to Marx and Engels, as you approach the classless Socialist or Communist society, the government ... eventually withers away" (ABC of Trotskyism, Workers International News Special, London, 1945).
 2. L. Trotsky, Results and Prospects, p.220
 3. I have quoted Lenin's statements on this fairly fully in my article on Trotsky and Socialism in One Country in New Left Review, No. 50, July-August, 1968. I am grateful to the Editor of N.L.R., for his permission to incorporate parts of that article into this section of the present study.
 4. Selected Works, IX, p. 381 and p.403
 5. Selected Works, VII, p.361.

the one hand, and collective farms on the other. (1) Defined in these terms, Stalin was able correctly to say after 1935 that Trotsky had been wrong and that "our bourgeoisie has already been liquidated and socialism has already been built in the main. This is what we call the victory of Socialism, or, to be more exact, the victory of Socialist Construction in one country." (2)

To leave the problem there would, however, be all too facile. Not only had the collectivisation of agriculture been carried out in an unnecessarily harsh and costly manner that left a bond of distrust between important sections of the peasantry and the proletarian state, but real political power was concentrated not democratically in the hands of the working people but effectively in those of Stalin and a small irresponsible ruling group paternalistically substituting itself for them. Stalin, whilst leading in an extraordinarily difficult international situation the laying, development and defence of the economic and cultural foundations of Socialism - his great historical merit - was riding roughshod over the democratic rights and organs of the Party and the people, carrying through widespread arbitrary and brutal persecution in which many of the finest Russian and foreign revolutionaries met a tragic end - his great crime which the Soviet Union and the international communist movement are still paying for dearly today.

Since for Marxists, socialism and democracy have always been considered to go hand in hand, Trotsky was on much stronger ground when, shifting his main line of argument, he came in the second half of the 'thirties to make his central objection to the claim that Socialism had been built in Russia the police terror and the general suppression of political freedom preceded and accompanied by a great increase in the power of the degenerated bureaucratic apparatus in both the Party and the State. What he failed to understand, however, was that it is possible to have for a certain even prolonged period, the uneasy and antagonistic coexistence of a Socialist economy and an undemocratic, un-Socialist superstructure. Sooner or later the development of the former will tend to push society (albeit tortuously, unevenly and not at all 'automatically') towards reforming the superstructure and bringing it more into keeping with its economic base and with the desires of its progressively more developed and educated working class and intelligentsia. What had been achieved in the 'thirties in terms of a Socialist economy was of course still only the bare bones of Socialism which required several more decades of peaceful growth before it fully overcame the terrible legacy of Russian backwardness and appeared as a fully developed, prosperous, harmonious and cultured Socialist society. The Soviet Union today though immensely more advanced than in the 'thirties, has still a long way to go in completing this stage of Socialist development as well as shedding many of the bureaucratic practices that still hamper the development of Socialist Democracy. Talk of a transition to

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1. In his article "On Co-operation", Lenin characterises this type of co-operative property, based on nationalisation of the land, as essentially Socialistic in character. (Selected Works, IX, p.407).
 2. J.V. Stalin, The Final Victory of Socialism in the Soviet Union, Reply to Ivanov, 12-2-38 (London, n.d.) pp. 3, 6. In his letter Stalin reiterates his previous qualification that "the final victory of Socialism, in the sense of full guarantee against the restoration of bourgeois property relations, is possible only on an international scale" and not so long as the Soviet Union was surrounded by numerous capitalist countries. (pp. 6-7)

Communism in the foreseeable future made in the Stalin and Krushchov eras are now generally seen to have contained an enormous amount of bombast and extravagant claims. It is fair to say that Trotsky's writings do provide a useful corrective to this sort of hyperbole, described by Togliatti as "a prevailing tendency in the exaltation of achievements to exaggerate, above all in the propaganda of that time, but also in the general presentation, and to consider all problems solved and the objective contradictions overcome, together with the difficulties and conflicts which are always inherent in the building up of Socialist society, are liable to be very serious and cannot be overcome unless they are recognised openly." (1) Right was also on Trotsky's side when he emphasised the internationalist essence of Communism, criticising the elements of narrow nationalism that more and more showed themselves in Stalin's Russia, isolated, encircled and threatened by hostile imperialist powers. But to conclude that the source of all evil in the Soviet Union was the theory of Socialism in One Country (2) and that Trotsky's fundamental objections to this are therefore vindicated, is to substitute windy and exaggerated generalisations for a balanced examination of the question in its different aspects. It is of course much easier to do this as it saves a lot of time, thought and research - but such a method has nothing in common with Marxism.

(c) The Character of the Soviet Union

The Trotskyist movement has experienced violent controversies and splits on the question of the nature of the Soviet Union. Trotsky, however, was firm in his characterisation of it as a "degenerated" and even "counter-revolutionary workers' state" (!) (3) but nonetheless a workers' state which "despite monstrous bureaucratic degeneration ... still remains the historical instrument of the working class in so far as it assures the development of economy and culture on the basis of nationalised means of production, and by virtue of this prepares the conditions for a genuine emancipation of the toilers through the liquidation of the bureaucracy and of social inequality." (4)

In keeping with this analysis, he fought all those in his movement who, particularly at the beginning of the war, wanted to reject the traditional Trotskyist slogan of "defence of the Soviet Union". His explanations of how he understood this slogan, however, vary considerably. Thus in 1937, before the Dewey Commission of Inquiry into the Moscow Trials (where he was in general at pains to appear reasonable), he said: "We will sustain Stalin and his bureaucracy in every effort it makes to defend the new form of property against

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1. P. Togliatti, Questions Posed by the 20th Congress of the CPSU, Interview with Nuovi Argumenti, (London, 1956) p.8.
 2. See, e.g., The Newsletter, 9 March, 1968: "Stalin's theory of 'Socialism in one country' led directly to the economic chaos and political purges of the 1930's" No attempt is made to explain the causal connections or to tell us, if this theory was responsible for the 'economic chaos', which theory was then responsible for the very great economic successes accepted by Trotsky to have taken place in this period.
 3. L. Trotsky, "In Defence of Marxism", (New York, 1965)
 4. L. Trotsky, "The Workers' State and the Question of Thermidor and Bonapartism" (London, n.d., S.L.L. duplicated pamphlet), p.7. All the "Fourth Internationals" still accept Trotsky's characterisation of the Soviet Union. The origins of the International Socialism group led by Tony Cliff, however, lie in a breakaway from orthodox Trotskyism on this question. They consider the Soviet Union (and the other socialist countries) to be "State capitalist". Hence the S.L.L. dubs their group "the State Capitalists".

"imperialist attacks" (1). However, in September 1939, he wrote: "In the U.S.S.R. the overthrow of the bureaucracy is indispensable for the preservation of state property. Only in this sense do we stand for the defence of the U.S.S.R. ... Our defence of the U.S.S.R. is carried on under the slogan 'For Socialism! For World Revolution! Against Stalin!'" (2)

(d) "The Revolution Betrayed"

"The Revolution Betrayed", written by Trotsky in 1936 and still the basic Trotskyist textbook on the Soviet Union, shows both the strengths and weaknesses of his position at this time. Analysing the development of the Soviet Union up to the mid-thirties, he scored not a few bull's-eyes in exposing such negative features of Stalinist Russia as the growth of bureaucracy, repression and gross inequality, the official hypocrisy and the stifling of artistic freedom. However, many of his criticisms are carping and ill-conceived, as for instance in his attack on the terms of the 1936 Constitution, the weakness of which lay not in its extremely democratic provisions, but their irrelevance to the real situation in the Soviet Union at that time when Stalin could and did trample them underfoot. For instance, he described the introduction of the universal, equal and direct vote (replacing the indirect system, the weighting of representation in favour of the working class as against the peasantry and the denial of the vote to members of former exploiting classes, priests, etc.) as "juridically liquidating the dictatorship of the proletariat" (3).

The constitution as a whole, he asserted, represents "an immense step back from Socialist to bourgeois principles" and "creates the political premises for the birth of a new possessing class!"(4)

Trotsky's dogmatic shibboleth of the impossibility of building Socialism in one country led him even now to underestimate how deeply entrenched and resilient the socialist system was in Russia, despite the ravages wrought by Stalin's purges. Without the interference of a revolution in the West in the event of war, he claimed, "the social base of the Soviet Union must be crushed, not only in the case of defeat, but also in the case of victory!" (5)

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1. "The Case of Leon Trotsky", p.282
 2. L. Trotsky "In Defence of Marxism", pp. 15-16, 20.
 3. L. Trotsky, "Revolution Betrayed", p. 261.
 4. Ibid., p.272
 5. L. Trotsky, "Revolution Betrayed", p.229. It is interesting to note that after the last war the Trotskyist Fourth International (there was still only one at that time!), far from making any self-criticism or analysis of their cardinal error, went on to repeat it. In 1946, under the heading "The Power of Marxist Prognosis", its International Conference claimed that "in every important respect the analysis of the Fourth International has stood the test of time", (Workers' International News, London, April-May, 1946, p.171) and proceeded in a resolution to state that "only the intervention of the proletarian revolution can prevent a fatal outcome for the U.S.S.R. in its present trial of strength with imperialism". (Quatrième Internationale, Paris, April-May 1946, p.18). It was of course at pains to assert that the war had "marked the brutal bankruptcy" of ... "the theory of Socialism in One Country"! (Ibid. p.16). 20 years later the fatal outcome had not materialised, but faithful Trotskyists were not inclined to let such banal considerations modify their views. Thus, in the Newsletter of Dec. 18, 1965, we find S.L.L. National Committee member Jack Gale asserting that "the bureaucracy" would "bring about the overthrow of the Soviet Union if it is not removed." Never say die!

Out of touch with Soviet reality, he wrote that "the Soviet bureaucracy has gone far towards preparing a bourgeois restoration" and "must inevitably in future stages seek supports for itself in property relations" entailing "its conversion into a new possessing class". (1)

In fact, of course, the victory of the Soviet Union in the war, (Trotsky had predicted defeat (2), was followed not by the slightest sign of a move towards a "bourgeois counter-revolution" (3) but on the contrary, by the establishment under the leadership of allegedly "counter-revolutionary" Communist Parties of Socialist property relations in thirteen other countries and the emergence of a World Socialist system competing with the capitalist one. Moreover, since Stalin's death in 1953, many of the most negative features of Stalinism spot-lighted by Trotsky, have been dismantled. This "de-Stalinisation", inadequate as it is, has not occurred through the "inevitable" violent political revolution to overthrow the bureaucracy led by a mythical "Soviet section of the Fourth International" as forecast and advocated in The Revolution Betrayed (4). It has taken place essentially through the initiative of forces within the Communist Party (which Trotsky had written off as "disintegrated" (5), "dead" (6), and "no longer the vanguard of the proletariat" (7), and its leading organs, and within "the bureaucracy", which was proportionately harder hit by Stalin's purges than any other section of the population and which on Trotsky's definition (8) included all Party, Y.C.L., State, Co-operative and collective farm leaders, officials, managers, technicians, foremen, and their families, drawn from among the most advanced sections of the working class and peasantry and constituting when Stalin died some 22 million people.

A fundamental Marxist criticism of Stalinism, which still remains to be made, will not proceed from Trotsky's premises, although his writings should be studied for the many valuable lessons - both positive and negative - that they hold for us. Yet even where his occasional insights are at their most brilliant, it is within the framework of a fundamentally false sociological model, which prevented him from understanding the laws of development of Soviet society or grasping the (admittedly new and unprecedented) phenomenon of Stalinism in its complexity and many-sidedness. Hence, the unkindness with which history has treated his major predictions that we have quoted in the course of this article.

(e) The Moscow Trials

In the Soviet Union in the years 1936-38, at the height of Stalin's mass repressions, there took place three public trials at which some of the best known Old Bolsheviks and leaders of the

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1. L. Trotsky, "Revolution Betrayed", pp. 253-4
 2. Ibid., p. 227
 3. Ibid., p.290
 4. Ibid., pp. 284-290
 5. L. Trotsky, "Stalinism and Bolshevism", p.8.
 6. L. Trotsky, Ibid., p.13.
 7. L. Trotsky, "Revolution Betrayed", p. 138
 8. L. Trotsky, Ibid. pp. 135 ff.

revolution pleaded guilty to charges of conspiracy, treason, terrorism, espionage and wrecking against the Soviet Union in collaboration with the leaders of Nazi Germany and Japan, to whom they were allegedly planning to cede huge slices of Soviet territory. The main defendant in these trials, in absentia, was Leon Trotsky, who was alleged from his exile abroad to have masterminded the conspiracy, seeing this as the only practicable way to overthrow Stalin and get back into power.

Re-reading the verbatim reports of the trials (1), alongside Trotsky's defence (2) and the findings of the counter-trials conducted in Mexico by the Dewey Commission (3), one can see that there were a number of demonstrable distortions of fact in the trial confessions that should at the time have given rise to concern and questioning. However, finding it virtually impossible to believe that a Socialist country would resort to legal frame-ups or that the accused would charge themselves with crimes which they never committed (4), the international Communist movement accepted the trials as evidence that Trotsky and his followers were acting as agents of Fascism against the Soviet Union and Communism.

Krushchov's revelations at the 20th Congress of the methods of torture used at Stalin's bidding to extract false confessions from Communist leaders (5) followed by the rehabilitation of the Hungarian Communist leader, Rajk, the Bulgarian Communist leader, Kostov, and later the Czechoslovak Communist leader, Slansky, already cast doubt upon confessions of guilt of this character. Certain rehabilitations and revelations in the Soviet Union, are, however, of such a nature as to undermine the validity specifically of the Moscow Trials. Thus, the assassination of Kirov, the suspicious circumstances surrounding which were revealed at the 20th and 22nd C.P.S.U. Congresses, was pivotal to the Zinoviev-Kamenev trial of 1936, and played a role in that of Radek, Piatakov, etc., the next year. The rehabilitation of Marshal Tukhachevsky and the Generals shot with him after a secret trial in 1937 (6), on whose guilt an important part of the case of the 1938 trial (Bukharin, Krestinsky, Rykov, etc.) was based (7), knocks a large part of the bottom out of the latter. If any further

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1. Reports of Court Proceedings of the Trial of the Trotskyite-Zinoviev Centre (Moscow 1936), of the Trial of the Anti-Soviet Trotskyite Centre (Moscow 1937) of the Trial of the Anti-Soviet Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites (Moscow, 1938)
 2. The Case of Leon Trotsky, (London, 1937)
 3. Not Guilty (London, 1938)
 4. See, e.g., J.R. Campbell, Soviet Policy and its Critics (London, 1939) p.265.
 5. The Dethronement of Stalin: Full Text of the Krushchev Speech (Manchester Guardian pamphlet, 1956), esp. pp. 13-18, 25. Although this speech, delivered at a closed session of the Congress, has still not been published in Russia, there is no question whatsoever about the genuineness of this text.
 6. Krushchev made public their innocence in his reply to discussion at the 22nd C.P.S.U. Congress in 1961, revealing that the Presidium of the Party had already approved their rehabilitation in 1957.
 7. Trial of Anti-Soviet Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites, pp. 186, 252-4. Evidence was given that "in Trotsky's opinion, Tukhachevsky and the military group were to be the decisive force of the counter-revolutionary action." (p.245)

proof of the invalidity of the trials were needed, it came in the autumn of 1963 when the Soviet Government newspaper, Izvestia, published a rehabilitation of the old Trotskyist, Krestinsky, one of the chief defendants at the 1938 trial at which he was condemned to death. At the trial he was alleged to have met Trotsky in France in 1933 and to have had the crucial role of establishing and maintaining illegal connections between him and the "Trotskyite Centre" in the U.S.S.R. (1)

It is to be hoped that the Soviet Union will soon officially revise these trials, which are said to be still "under investigation" and to which (as far as I have been able to ascertain) no reference has appeared for twelve years in any Soviet book or article. Without waiting for this, however, I believe we have sufficient evidence to warrant our following the lead of the Italian Communist Party which, since November 1961, has publicly rejected the accusations of a criminal character against Trotsky made at the trials, but expressed the view that the struggle against him in essential political elements was a correct one (2). The absence of a public revision of former support for the trials by British Communists provides an opportunity for the S.L.L. in particular to harrass us persistently on this question. Such a revision, necessary above all in the interests of truth, would also remove this convenient weapon from their armoury. Moreover, it would emphasise the essential point, understood by most British Communists for many years now, that our opposition to Trotskyism is on political grounds, and our public controversies with its supporters can be fought only with political weapons.

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1. Trial of Anti-Soviet Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites, pp. 276 ff. 733. At the trial Krestinsky 'confessed' to having as early as 1921 negotiated an agreement between Trotsky and the German General Staff whereby they would give Trotsky 60,000 dollars a year to subsidise illegal Trotskyite activity in Russia and as payment for espionage information from him and Krestinsky (pp. 269-260).
 2. Report of Press Conference by G. Pajetta, of the leadership of the Italian Communist Party, in l'Unita, December 1961.

END OF PART ONE

To Follow:

* Part 2. TROTSKY & THE INTERNATIONAL
* LABOUR MOVEMENT

* Part 3. TROTSKYIST POLICIES TODAY
